

## **Video Transcript**

### **UGRAD Alum Organizes Charity Run Across Ukraine**

My name is Andriy Maksymovich, I'm the UGRAD program alumnus of the year 2005. During my UGRAD year, I was studying at Eastern Connecticut State University.

The actual idea of the Race for Children National Charitable Marathon came from my UGRAD year. In Fall 2004, when I just arrived on campus, it turned out that all the University dorms were closed and my supervisor told me that I would stay for a week with his friend, Raymond Aramini. Ray actually undertook a project biking across the United States to raise money for the local soup kitchen and Connecticut food bank. We became really close friends and I decided why not try to initiate something like this in Ukraine.

Preliminarily, we decided to focus on children as the most vulnerable part of the population. We just toured all of the hospitals so that we could make an objective decision.

It was actually after we came to the maternity hospital. We saw this equipment dating back to the 1970s, 1980s... these almost rusty incubators, with these newborns laying there.

Currently, we've raised nearly \$55,000. One of the ways in which we were raising money was the installation of the charitable boxes. When people would go out into the city, they were able to actually donate in these public places where they were.

The physical result of the project is basically the equipment, which we installed in maternity hospitals.

We are grateful to IREX and the Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs for the alumni small grant that really enabled organization of this project. But at the same time, this project would not be possible without over 60 volunteers that we had.

I'm not a professional jogger. I've never jogged more than two miles. I remember when I was a small kid, I was also thinking about, you know, it would be nice to really discover Ukraine with all the people that you could meet on the way.

My friend's name was Kostya... Kostyantyn Labartkava... I remember I approached Kostya with the proposal to run across the country. As everyone else on this project, he was surprised of course. He said, "Well, let's give it a shot... It sounds interesting."

We were splitting the daily distance. Each day we would run for about 40 or 50 kilometers, which would be around 25 to 30 miles a day.

I would say the first couple of days were really tough; we were a little bit worried about whether we were going to make it in general, we were worried about the weather. In the end, you know, all our worries, they actually favored us.

Often, we had journalists or police accompanying us. They would be quite skeptical at first. At the end of the day, they would turn to smiling and wishing us good luck and congratulating us in what we do, which was a great pleasure too. People would meet us with smiles, they listen to us – we listen to them. It was great news to us that people were conducting similar projects within their communities.

Ambassador Taylor, a former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, during the press conference he said that this project is remarkable in the way that it shows that Ukrainians are helping Ukrainians. People are really willing to help each other, even though they are in different communities. Still, there is mutual understanding and willingness for mutual help.

We are turning what was then the Race for Children Marathon into a long-term initiative of assisting maternity hospitals in particular and, I hope, the public health sphere in general.

My basic advice would be: believe in yourself and your team, define what your talents are, what your strengths are, and remember the proverb that even a very long path starts with a single step.

The final moment when the equipment is presented, when you see the children that are actually able to benefit from the installed equipment, you just say this, “Whoo,” and you really understand that perhaps all these years of efforts were really worth it.